

GamerZines

ISSUE 05 | JUNE 2013

# FirstLook

by PreOrder-IQ.com



**IN-DEPTH PREVIEW**

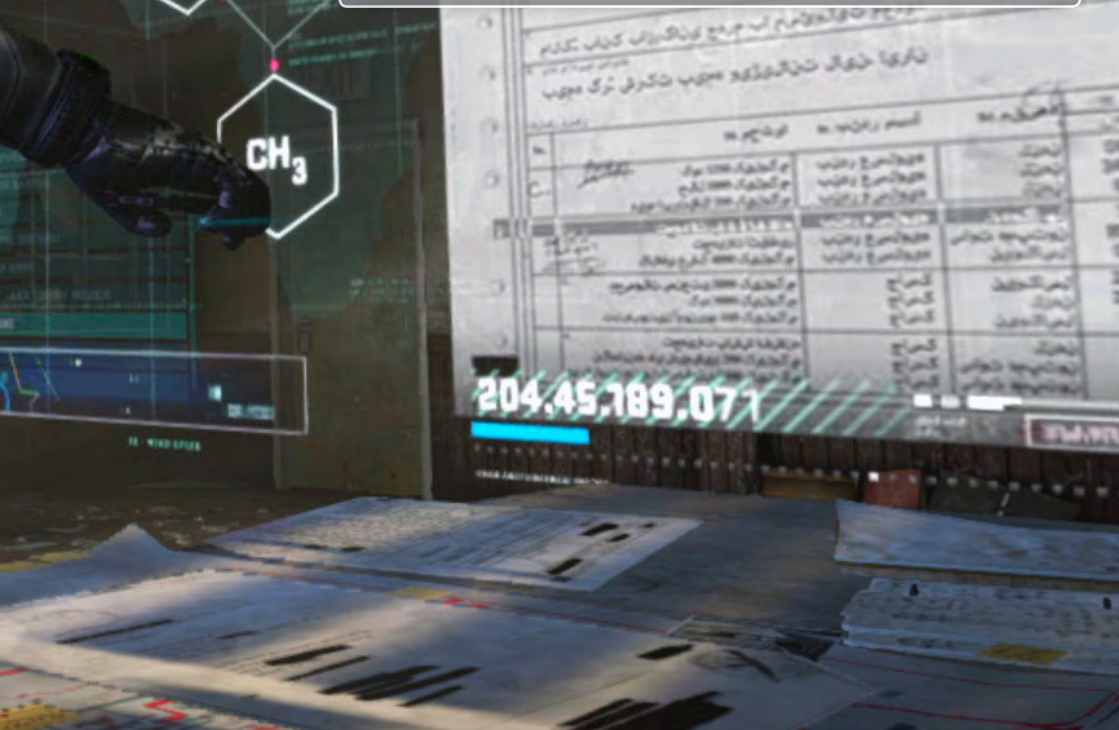
# COMPANY<sup>of</sup> HEROES<sup>®</sup> 2

TOM CLANCY'S  
**SPLINTER  
CELL**





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# WELCOME TO FirstLook



**B**atman: Arkham Origins, Watch\_Dogs, Beyond: Two Souls and a little indie title known as Grand Theft Auto V await you in this special issue, but hold on a tick... Aren't May issues of games magazines usually light on content in preparation for

the almighty cavalcade of loud craziness that is the E3 conference in LA? Not this year it seems.

This month Activision revealed the yearly iteration of *Call of Duty* a month early, EA announced a deal with Disney to make multiple games based on the *Star Wars* universe and Microsoft are all set to reveal their successor to the Xbox 360 – three whole weeks before E3. Usually these announcements are held back for June, but this year for one reason or another that hasn't happened and frankly we're grateful. This new precedent has allowed this May issue of *FirstLook Magazine* to be full to bursting, with 11 great games and new reveals about some of the biggest releases on the planet! Bah E3, who needs ya? Happy reading.

**Andy Griffiths, Editor**  
[FIRSTLOOK@gamerzines.com](mailto:FIRSTLOOK@gamerzines.com)

## MEET THE TEAM

Still picking over  
some delectable  
pre-orders...



**Joe Robinson**  
Give him an RTS and he's yours!

**Don't miss!**  
*This month's  
top highlights!*



## COMPANY OF HEROES 2



## WARGAME: AIRLAND BATTLE



## BEYOND: TWO SOULS



## THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE



## Investigating **THE BUREAU:** **XCOM DECLASSIFIED**



## The continued evolution of **AUTO CLUB REVOLUTION**

## QUICK FINDER



**Batman:**  
Arkham Origins  
**Grand Theft**  
**Auto V**  
Company of  
Heroes 2  
**Wargame:**  
**Airland Battle**  
Auto Club  
Revolution  
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DLC and UGC  
Round-up

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**Beyond:**  
**Two Souls**  
**Knights of Pen**  
**& Paper RPG**  
**Lord of the**  
**Rings Online**  
**Night of**  
**the Rabbit**

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# FirstLook |



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**PREVIEW**

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OF THE  
MONTH**

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**FirstLook** | Preview

# WATCH\_DOGS

PUB: UBISOFT  
DEV: IN-HOUSE  
PLAT: XBOX 360,  
PS3, PS4, PC, WII U  
ETA: 22ND NOV

## ABSOLUTE POWER

One man's terrorist is another's man freedom fighter, the only difference between the two is the commentator's view of the government in power. With technology encroaching on personal freedom on an increasing basis in the modern era, it's no wonder that *Watch\_Dogs*, an open-world game where the player turns said technology against the agencies that wield it, made such waves when it was first unveiled at last year's E3. Wisely Ubisoft are pursuing this concept of absolute power corrupting absolutely as the basis for *Watch\_Dog's* campaign, with the player assuming the role of troubled hacker, Aiden Pearce.

Set in a futuristic version of a Chicago controlled by a super computer known as the Central Operating System, players wield a host of devices which can listen in on nearby phone calls, disrupt electrical signals, access travel infrastructure and basically screw around with the nearby populous in any way they see fit. The potential fun this kind of sandbox experience could offer is easy to see, especially as players are free to go wherever they wish, but what really interests us is this freedom versus surveillance context which the narrative is framed around. Knowing Ubisoft they'll explore this unsettling debate to its fullest. ■



## CROSSING THE LINE

# DARK



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**FirstLook** |

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**- Hooked Gamers**

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**- Gamercast**



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# BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

PUB: WARNER BROS.

DEV: WB GAMES

MONTREAL

PLATFORMS: PC, XBOX 360,  
PLAYSTATION 3

## BRUCE EARNS HIS WINGS

**W**hen we heard the next *Arkham* game involved a young inexperienced Bruce Wayne fighting supervillains for the first time, we felt a little disappointed. It isn't that we doubt WB Montreal's abilities, it's just that abandoning *Arkham City*'s continuity to tell an uninteresting back story of Batman's evolution into the Dark Knight seems a bit of a backward step. The new studio needs to take substantial risks to make *Origins* seem worthwhile, but from the early

information released they seem to be doing exactly that. The entire campaign takes place in an open-world snow-filled Gotham during Christmas Eve, with Batman facing a supervillain team consisting of Penguin, Deathstroke (*Teen Titans* fans know him well) and the criminal kingpin, Black Mask.

It's unclear why Rocksteady has been taken off the *Arkham* series which they made a success, but who knows, maybe new blood could be exactly what Batman needs to flourish once more? ■





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**FirstLook** |



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# GRAND THEFT AUTO V

**PUB: ROCKSTAR GAMES**  
**DEV: ROCKSTAR NORTH**  
**PLATFORMS: XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 3**  
**ETA: 17TH SEPTEMBER**

## A BRAVE NEW WORLD

Once again the Internet exploded in anticipation for the next entry in the *GTA* series this month, as Rockstar released not one but three brand new trailers showcasing the character traits of their three new protagonists – budding gangster Franklin, marginalised mob-man Michael and the violently unhinged Trevor. Now we could tell you about the ability to switch between these main characters at will and the eight different heists which make up *GTA V*'s story-driven campaign, but that's old hat.

The new information which emerged this month centred on the sequel's

open-world itself. Los Santos, as seen in *San Andreas*, returns as the setting in *V* but the grand urban centre based on LA now boasts explorable underwater areas and a dynamic ecosystem supporting various wildlife, a la *Red Dead Redemption*, resulting in an explorable space many times larger than *GTA IV*'s Liberty City. Helicopters, planes, ATVs, motorbikes, bicycles, BMXs and trains all feature, creating a sandbox more rife with violent shenanigans than anything Rockstar has created before.

*GTA V* is set to be massive in scope and significance, and we'll share more info about it over the coming months. ■



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PC GAMER 86/100

**'REBELLION IS THE BEST WAY YET TO EXPERIENCE THE STRATEGIC JOYS OF THE SINS A SOLAR EMPIRE FRANCHISE'**

- GAMESPOT 8.5/10

**'...THIS IS THE ULTIMATE VERSION OF SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE, THIS IS A VERY GOOD 4X STRATEGY GAME'**

- STRATEGY INFORMER 8.5/10



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## WATCH\_DOGS

Move over *Assassin's Creed*, Ubisoft has a new favourite!

It's kinda crazy how quickly gamers have been won over by *Watch\_Dogs*. Usually we're all quite a cynical bunch, but with Ubisoft's new golden child we were more than happy to swoon over the near future Chicago open-world setting and the exciting gameplay potential of possessing a tool which can hack through every known electrical device on the planet. Interestingly, excitement for *Watch\_Dogs* has seemingly run in parallel with

interest in the *Assassin's Creed* series subsiding. Could Ubisoft's latest creation force the *Assassin* clan to go on forced sabbatical come 2014? Doubtful, especially seeing as *Assassin's Creed 3* sold over 12 million units worldwide and that tally is still growing. Never the less, many will be keeping an eye on both games at E3 this June to see which third-person franchise comes out on top. The smart money ain't on pirates...



PUB: UBISOFT  
DEV: IN-HOUSE  
PLAT: PS3, PS4  
XBOX 360,  
WII U, PC  
ETA: 22ND NOV



## GRAND THEFT AUTO V

PUB: ROCKSTAR GAMES  
PLAT: XBOX 360,  
PS3  
ETA: 17TH SEPTEMBER

We all should resign ourselves to the fact that *GTA V* will top 'Must Have' lists from now until release day. Thankfully the emergence of Rockstar's next open-world game isn't too far off, and the studio is revealing

more info about their sequel every month. For May, Rockstar revealed three new trailers, and needless to say their open-world sequel looks absolutely stunning. Hurry up September, we don't want to wait any more!

## BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

PUB: WARNER BROS.  
DEV: WB MONTREAL  
PLAT: XBOX 360, PS3, PC, WII U  
ETA: 25TH OCTOBER

For the third entry in the *Batman: Arkham* series, Warner Bros. has elected to give series stalwarts Rocksteady a break in preference of the entirely unproven WB Montreal. New blood can

sometimes reinvigorate a series, other times it can condemn a proven money maker to the scrapheap. It'll be very interesting to see which quarter *Arkham Origins* finds itself in.



# DIABLO III

PUB: BLIZZARD  
DEV: IN-HOUSE  
PLATFORM: PS3, PS4  
ETA: 2013



Yeah, yeah *Diablo III* has been out on PC for ages, but it's coming to PlayStation 3 and 4 with a bunch of improvements. Blizzard has gotten rid of the in-game real money cash

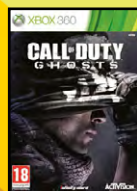
shop (hurray!) which means console players can play offline and online, and there's the option for four-player local split-screen co-op as well. Not too shabby for a post-release port.

PUB: ACTIVISION  
DEV: INFINITY WARD  
PLAT: PC, XBOX 360, PS3, WII U  
ETA: JUNE

## CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS

The next line in the stupendously successful *Call of Duty* series was announced this month and unsurprisingly, details were thin on the ground. *Ghosts* features a new engine,

new characters and setting which fans haven't seen before, but that's pretty much all we know. Expect Microsoft's next-gen Xbox reveal to contain plenty more info.



## GRID 2

PUB: CODEMASTERS  
DEV: IN-HOUSE  
PLAT: PS3, XBOX 360, PC  
ETA: 31ST MAY



This sequel has us caught in two minds. On the one hand we're excited that Codemasters is adopting a radically different approach to the original – dropping the real-world

motorsport context in pursuit of creating their own fictional series – but on the other we wish *GRID 2* was just a fleshed-out version of the original. Are we bad people?

## SINS OF THE SOLAR EMPIRE



PUB:  
KALYPSO  
MEDIA  
DEV:  
STARDOCK  
PLAT: PC  
ETA: JUNE

Kalypso are putting out a special boxed edition of *Sins of the Solar Empire: Rebellion*. The pack includes the original *Sins*, both *Diplomacy* and *Entrenchment* expansions and a special soundtrack CD. If you've yet to lose yourself to this critically acclaimed 4X strategy experience, this set represents the ideal opportunity to start.

## SPLINTER CELL: BLACKLIST



PUB: UBISOFT  
DEV: UBISOFT  
TORONTO  
PLAT: X360, PS3,  
PC, WII U  
ETA: 23RD  
AUGUST

In *Blacklist* the much loved competitive multiplayer mode 'Spies vs Mercs' finally returns and frankly we couldn't be happier about it. We spent way too much playing this mode at uni, care of *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*, and it's going to be fascinating to see how Ubisoft twist the concept for the next game in the series. Bagsy spy!



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S



18<sup>TM</sup>

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PROVISIONAL

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TOM CLANCY'S

# PLINTER CELL BLACKLIST

COMING AUGUST 23<sup>RD</sup>



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FEATURING THE RETURN  
OF SPIES VS. MERCS



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# Investigating...

## THE BUREAU

— XCOM DECLASSIFIED —

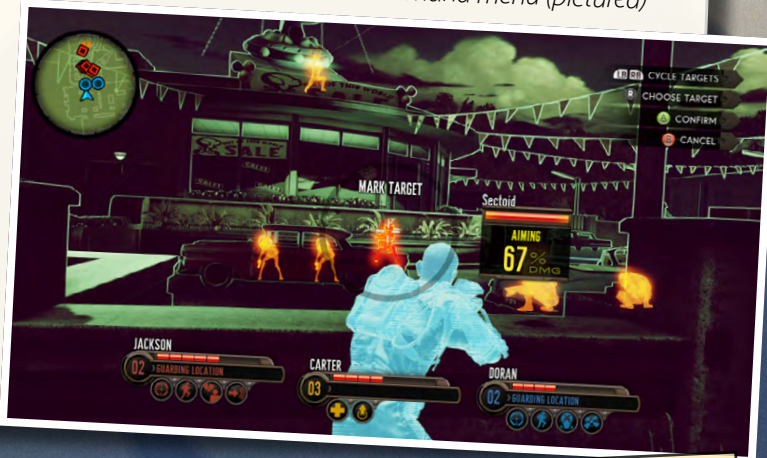
**L**ike a shadowy Sectoid emerging from the unexplored fog, the long-in-development XCOM shooter has re-emerged sporting a fancy new title, a hitherto unknown emphasis on strategic gameplay and, a first for the series, real-time 'ratatatat' action with the player able to fight off the alien threat directly themselves while simultaneously ordering squadmates to take cover, cast out special attacks and move around for the best strategic advantage – all while staying in the third-person perspective.

*The Bureau* itself isn't a surprising leap for the XCOM brand, after all shooters tend to be more popular than turn-based strategy experiences, so the only question that needs answering is why 2K

has left it this late to finally unveil 2K Marin's reimagining, with its release only a couple of months away. Was it to do with the unfair backlash that came along with the shooter's announcement way back in 2010, or did the publisher not have faith in the Californian developer's work? The likelihood is we'll never know the real story behind this release's traumatic development, and the truth is we don't really need to, as we finally got a chance to play *The Bureau* for ourselves earlier this month and do you know what? It's shaping up surprisingly well. Here's what we know about this rebranded release thus far...

## I. TACTICS

**The Bureau** represents the turn-based **XCOM** series' first foray into live-action combat with players able to actually kill enemy characters directly themselves. This jump may sound massive for this series, but **The Bureau's** gameplay actually emulates a lot of **XCOM's** core combat – only the perspective has shifted. Rather than looking down on the battlefield remotely as 'the all-powerful' Commander, players assume the role of Agent Carter, who has the ability to order around his two fellow squadmates at will. All this is done via a command menu (pictured) which when accessed slows time, enabling players to evaluate the encounter in front of them, send out move orders, use powers against a specific targets and revive fallen heroes. It all feels very **Mass Effect**-like, only with squadmates able to revive the player character when downed. The **XCOM** name is there for a reason...

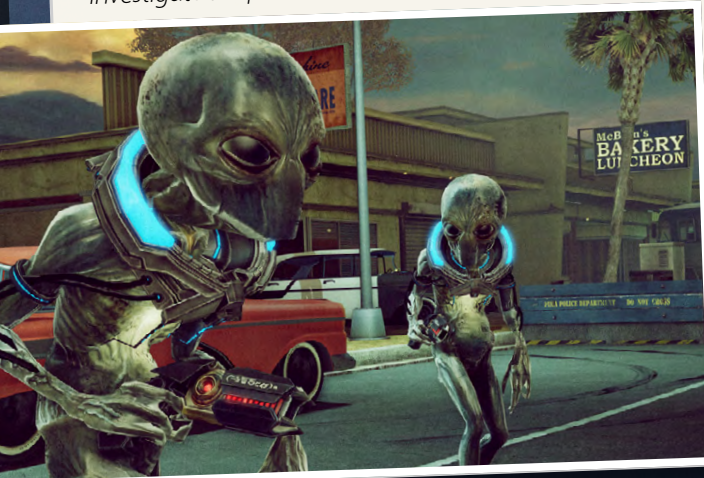


## II. THE PREMISE

Rather than the plot kicking off in the near future, like every other **XCOM** game, **The Bureau** takes place in 1962, with President John F. Kennedy setting up a new spook squad to investigate the presence of aggressive foreign forces on native soil, and eradicate any evidence

of their activities, in order to safeguard the USA's international reputation for being untouchable.

Originally the unit was meant to combat the influence of the Communist threat, but when interstellar visitors start enslaving folks in New Mexico, **The Bureau's** remit changes. The player-character Agent Carter acts as a vessel for players to witness The Bureau's transition into the international xeno-busting army we're all aware of.



## III. BACK AT BASE

**The Bureau** isn't a linear experience. Instead, all activities begin at the taskforce's base with players then selecting missions for their fully customisable squad to be sent on. This facility includes research labs, an office for Agent Carter, research & engineering and the situation room which has a map of the USA detailing various missions for players to send their squad on. There

are three mission types in total: Minor Operations, which resemble side missions potentially offering up XP and artefacts to better your agent's combat ability and tech, Dispatch Missions, which are activities that players can send their agents on without heading to the battlefield themselves, and Major Operations, which move the plot forward.

All of this functionality is similar to the Mission Control hub seen in **XCOM: Enemy Unknown**, but in **The Bureau** players are free to explore this area in a third-person perspective and talk to those who are part of the taskforce. How 2K Marin are going to make all of this walking around interesting is unclear, but it's good to know **XCOM's** trademark Mission Command hub has made it into **The Bureau** in some fashion.



## IV. SQUAD OF CHOICE

The class-based squad system returns in **The Bureau**, with squadmates falling into four disciplines: Support Officer, Recon, Engineer and Commando. Effectively this translates into heavy, sniper, turret and mine dispenser and tough bad-ass respectively, but the really neat thing is that players can create their own recruit by choosing a character's story and trait background, face and name. Obviously christening your squadmate of choice after the cat

or dog changes the tone of battle, not to mention the impact of permadeath, but we're glad we can give battles that much more of a personal touch.

Each class has its own skill tree, with XP earned from missions unlocking new abilities. Squadmates and the player character can be revived if gel is applied before the timer runs out, but if a squadmate goes down and you can't get to him or her in time you'll have to carry on the mission without them. That's another trope of the franchise sorted then...



## V. PUTTING STORY FIRST

One line more than any other sums up 2K Marin's approach to **The Bureau** and that's 'putting story first'. This term was batted around by Alyssa Finley, 2K's VP of Product Development, multiple times during the gameplay demo and it's a direction this series has never focused on before. Seeing as the developer behind this reimagining, 2K Marin, is most notable for their work on **BioShock**

**2** it isn't surprising they're going for this character-driven focus, but it's unclear if it'll work properly in a game which offers so much player choice.

The missions themselves seem fairly linear. The one we sampled was set mid-way through the 12-hour minimum campaign and involved Agent Carter investigating the disappearance of a team led by Carter's friend Agent Da Silva in Pima, New Mexico. On arrival Carter spots the town in desolate ruins with only meandering civs bleeding black goo from their eyes and noses repeating their last conscious thought over and over, walking the streets. Those kinds of eerie touches have only been briefly touched upon in **XCOM** before, but here they are fully explored.

2K Marin aren't shifting the source material too much but they are humanising the drama with fully rounded characters, dialogue wheels and optional hidden transcripts to pad out the universe. Fans will argue whether that kind of padding is necessary from now until doomsday, but we're glad 2K Marin are rising to the challenge.



**T**he very existence of *The Bureau* has proven controversial, which is a real shame. 2K Marin's spin-off seems like a respectful reimagining of the series fans love, boasting a more personal approach to strategic gameplay in an attempt to attract non-strategy loving gamers to the franchise. How far those concessions go is impossible to tell by just playing through one mission, but we came away impressed.

The emphasis on elevated cover, utilising support powers, and knowing when to retreat and engage is all here, only wrapped in a much

more welcoming third-person single-player only wrapper. Inevitably that means the combat won't quite be as challenging – at least that's what we found with our character only dying once during the mission playthrough before getting subsequently revived by a squadmate – but that's absolutely fine. The *XCOM* series has been tackled by multiple developers over the years and this is just the next stage of that evolution.

Undoubtedly there's definitely plenty more to see of *The Bureau*, but we remain confident 2K Marin are on the right track. ■

# COMPANY OF HEROES 2

## CAMPAIGN HANDS-ON



**PUB:** SEGA  
**DEV:** RELIC  
**ENTERTAINMENT**  
**LAST GAME:**  
**WARHAMMER 40K:**  
**SPACE MARINE**  
**PLATFORMS:** PC  
**ETA:** 12TH JULY

### *Fighting for every inch*

**M**ake no mistake, *Company of Heroes 2* is a sobering RTS experience. The true blue heroism associated with the first game's European war focus has transitioned to the Eastern Front and with that comes much more uncomfortable themes of Soviets killing soldiers who retreat to prevent mass desertions, villages being burned to the ground so they don't fall into the hands of the Nazis and sending soldiers to war without a weapon in their hands. If the original *Company of Heroes* was a blockbuster-esque glorification of war, than this is the gritty rebuttal with the campaign dropping its regiment focus in favour of following one disgraced officer: Lev Abramovich Isakovich.

We've seen *Company of Heroes 2* in action multiple times, and throughout the game's development Relic has always talked of their ambitions to humanise the Eastern Front conflict. In the West it's all too easy to be preoccupied with American and

British operations during the war (see *Band of Brothers*, *Saving Private Ryan*), but by shifting the narrative to the snow-covered pastures of the East, the sequel's campaign comes across as refreshing.

From the off it's clear that Relic are following a different route to their previous work, as the opening cut-scene pans up to Isakovich imprisoned in a Siberian labour camp talking with his former commander. The hostility between the pair is obvious as they both bat around the morality of what they did to ensure Russia's survival against Germany's attempted occupation, and recap major moments from the war for the Communist Heartland. This narrative frame provides the basis for the 14-mission-long campaign which as you'd expect features some gritty material.

Real-time strategy games rarely try to tackle the morality of war, and *Company of Heroes 2* doesn't go quite that far. Instead Relic only emulate the reality of the

*"From the off it's clear  
that Relic are following  
a different route to their  
previous work"*



# PREVIEW



The population cap means that you need to choose units very carefully. Maxing out the cap and not having any infantry to capture points is easily managed.

Cut-scenes don't quite match Blizzard in terms of scope or grandeur, but they are tense and well-directed.



war from 1941-1945 – at least from the armed forces perspective – and this culminates in a sombre tone throughout, despite the stirring Russian orchestral/choir soundtrack.

During our hands-on we got to sample five different missions in the single-player campaign – two missions to defend and liberate Stalingrad, one strategic retreat from Moscow, a battle in Mtsensk and an atmospheric one-squad Panzer-hunting mission on the outskirts of Leningrad. In the grand RTS tradition, each mission

is bookended by surprisingly tense cinematics, with briefings written in the game menus offering up detailed historical

---

*“Single-player missions range from heavily scripted to relatively freeform”*

---

context and FMVs to outline both the relevance of the mission key areas and objectives to look out for on the battlefield.



## THEATRE OF WAR

This standalone mode, separate to the campaign and competitive multiplayer, features particular battles from the Eastern Front on a year-by-year basis. At launch, *Company of Heroes 2* will feature multiple missions from 1941 with historical context given via detailed blurbs in the menu. These missions range from co-op to single-player and have been tailored for either German or Russian forces. Expect Relic to expand these post-launch as this mode is the ideal vehicle for the team to feature and emulate battles which otherwise couldn't fit in the campaign. As pre-orders bonuses go this is bulky.



## HEARTS AND MINDS

Single-player missions range from heavily scripted to relatively freeform, but the core thread we noticed throughout the majority of missions was the increased to and fro nature of battle. During the Battle for Mtsensk our infantry-only forces had to hold out and retreat against a Nazi tank and infantry advance, and after we held out for long enough, half-a-dozen T-34 medium tanks rolled into town allowing the tide to be turned. Couple these tried-and-tested moments with objectives like burning strategically important buildings to the ground, despite civilians being trapped inside, means that the themes of Russian forces being stretched and 'doing what is necessary' is regularly pounded home.

The core strategic gameplay is largely the same as the one detailed in last month's multiplayer preview of *Company of Heroes 2*. Tanks still rule all, but are expensive, while infantry forces are versatile and cheap – with unit caps preventing players from spamming forces onto the



# INTERVIEW

## QUINN DUFFY

### Game Director

**What was it like being at Relic during the transition of ownership between THQ and SEGA? Was the development *Company of Heroes 2*'s affected at all?**

Maybe it was just me, but even at the time of THQ going under it felt like a lot of people I was talking to just knew we [Relic] were going to survive. You know this is Relic, so of course we'll survive. Whether it was over-confidence or whatever, it all felt okay. I wasn't worried about waking up and finding out I didn't have a job. Maybe it was a defence mechanism, I don't know, but it just didn't cross my mind.

**While working for *FirstLook*'s sister magazine, *PCGZine*, we were one of the last outlets to see *Company of Heroes 2* at Relic before THQ's assets were auctioned off. That was way back in December last year I think...**

Yeah, that sounds about right.

**Even at that time rumours were swirling round about THQ's financial troubles, yet you guys seemed relaxed about everything. Was that mainly due to the CEO of THQ, Jason Rubins, giving Relic assurances that all was going to be okay?**

They had a lot of confidence. Whether they did internally or not I can't say, but they were projecting outward confidence and reassurance. I think the challenge is that there's only so many ways that you can talk about the sky falling, or 'Don't worry about the sky falling' before you say 'Okay, they keep telling us that the sky isn't falling, but they keep telling us that!' I think it would have been interesting to see what their plans were. They were communicating a few things. If THQ managed to survive with investors we wondered what was that entity going to look like going forward.

We were comfortable with a lot of people at THQ as they had been a partner for years and we had formed some great relationships, but were they mortally stricken? If THQ were to continue would it limp along or would it have been reinvigorated? That's something that I thought about quite a bit at that time.

**It must have helped you guys massively to have a product to show and tout around in *Company of Heroes 2*. There was and still a lot of excitement surrounding the game.**

Yeah, and also that in December of last year we were more or less final.

# PREVIEW

Company of Heroes 2's interface is very easy-to-use. The icons in the top right show status for every unit and when double-clicked transport the camera immediately to said force. Grouping up units is a doddle as well.



battlefield thoughtlessly. In the context of this conflict that concession to technology restraints actually works really well, with players able to consolidate squads and even disband them to allow enough population points to become available to spawn in a Halftrack or earth-scorching Katyusha mobile rocket launcher.

The art of pinning down enemy troops before shelling them into oblivion still works a treat, but when you see fleshy forms obliterated in a hail of metallic shrapnel and debris, it's hard not to feel a slight tinge of regret. The new Essence 3 engine captures the sombre tone of battle perfectly with soldiers ragdolling into the air and vehicles pitifully collapsing under sheets of ice, but it never gets to gratuitous levels. The weather

mechanic also feeds into that, with infantry squads during the harshest of blizzard conditions losing health when left out of cover far from a heat source. Yes, this mechanic is fiddly and it does make you consider the position of each of unit very carefully,

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***"In this conflict, men and resources are at a premium"***

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but that's kind of the point – in this conflict, men and resources are at a premium so chucking a squad into the meat grinder is even more ill-advised than you'd expect.

This heightened value of individual units also ties into the emphasis on upgrades. Producing a unit is really just half of the work, as from there



you can add upgrades like giving engineers flamethrowers so they can defend themselves over a short range and adding a full-swivel MG turret to a Halftrack to make it the ideal mobile anti-infantry weapon. Unit special abilities can also make a massive difference. The sniper unit's ability to send in flares to make areas visible is particularly significant, especially when used with artillery units. Unfortunately air units like IL2 are still restricted to occasional support power use, but that doesn't make their destructive prowess any less impressive.

What surprised us the most during the campaign playthrough was how reactive the AI during battles actually was. Much of *Company of Heroes 2*'s missions are linear, but in the moment-to-moment skirmishes



# INTERVIEW CONT.

We were getting ready to finish the game, so we were very busy in that time period and I think it kept people distracted a little bit and made us realise how much was left to do of the game. When SEGA came along we knew what we wanted to finish, what was left and we were able to create and get through top ten list for parts of the game and say, 'Okay, this is what we're going to do. We're going to fix this'.

## **What's it like to be suddenly given three extra months to work on a game just before deadline? We can't imagine what that feels like!**

It doesn't happen much! (laughs) It was really good, we would have lobbied for it from anybody. I think the guys at THQ, given the breathing room of new investment, would have had the same conversation; those guys were smart. Objectively the game would've been fine shipping in March or whatever it was, as it was at a relatively high level, but I don't think it was up to our standard. We have to get down to the details, the subtlety and fix all those little things and the game started to feel better.

## **You could tell from *Company of Heroes 2*'s ongoing multiplayer Beta that you guys can fix problems and iterate successfully very quickly. Has the *Theatre of War* mode come from that deadline extension? As it really is a bulky piece of content.**

No, we've had that in there for quite a while. I think what we've been able to do again with those three extra months is refine the menu a little bit, get the map looking better, etc. Initially it [menu] was basically going to be a set of drop-downs, but that's not really interesting, so we got the map in there in order to make it look like a finished piece of content. We made sure that with difficulty tuning, the campaign could be played by a wide range of skillsets and at the same time that challenges are challenging enough – all that kind of stuff. That was one of the areas we were kept tweaking and refining, and with the campaign iterative polish on all the missions and difficulty tuning is still underway. Three months goes fast with AI tweaking, balance and bug fixing, but you can get a lot done in that amount of time.

## **Relic is a natural fit for SEGA, as the Japanese publisher has almost accidentally become a major player in the PC market. They own Creative Assembly who put out the *Total War* games, and Sports Interactive who put out *Football Manager*. What is it like to be part of this new group? Have you met Creative Assembly yet?**

There was a studio swap visit planned, but they got really busy and we got really busy and it hasn't happened yet, but that meeting of the minds is really important. What SEGA expects from their studios is a lot more independence, so positions that used to be at the publisher like marketing



"The AI you loved/hated from the previous game is even tougher than before and can cause 'rage quits' even quicker"



even on the easiest difficulty, enemy forces were quick to requisition any fallen gear from my defeated forces – be it flamethrower, anti-tank cannon or even repairing stricken tanks for their own use. Lovers of skirmish mode should heed our words, the AI you loved/hated from the previous game is even tougher than before and can cause 'rage quits' even quicker at the highest difficulty level.

It's a shame there isn't any option to play through missions as German forces, but then that would break the kind of narrative experience Relic are going for, and there's always that route in the *Theatre of War* mode.

After taking in some multiplayer, a brief number of missions from the campaign, and the standalone *Theatre of War* single-player and co-op segment, it's clear that *Company of Heroes 2* is a well-rounded and surprisingly varied RTS experience. The campaign offers the kind of



Tanks will crush infantry quickly, as they can simply obliterate the cover they're sheltering behind.

respectful emulation of the Eastern Front you'd expect with some uncomfortable issues tackled, whereas the core RTS gameplay still emphasises the drama, impact and indeed fun of wielding this time period's deadliest war machines.

There is a slight emotional disconnection between those two ideals, but this sequel is certainly more adult and uncompromising regarding World War 2 than the vast majority of other games out there, and Relic deserves a lot of credit for that. It's been over six years since *Company of Heroes* rocked the RTS world, but its successor is absolutely worth the wait and takes the series in some new yet exciting directions. ■

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# INTERVIEWCONT.

and PR they want to bring back into the studio, which we love the idea of because we get to work with these people every day. They get to play the game every day. We've already started to bring in new positions with the community. This allows Relic to grow and own our own stuff, from graphics right down to the PR, from the game to everything around the game. That's something that we've never really done before.

**That's really interesting, especially when you factor in the recent announcement from SEGA that they've snapped up the *Warhammer* license from Games Workshop – apart from 40K which Relic has obviously played a big part in making so popular with the *Dawn of War* series and *Space Marine*. Can you clear up whether Relic Entertainment still has access to the 40K license or not? There still seems to be a lot of confusion out there. . .**

That's the thing with the legal stuff around the license. Once THQ is dissolved as an entity, Games Workshop takes that back and they can do what they want with it. There's a huge amount of respect between Relic and Games Workshop and I would think they would want us to be involved somewhere.

**Today we got our first chance to play *Company of Heroes 2*'s campaign and we were shocked about how character-driven the Soviet versus Nazi narrative is with players following the exploits of a single Russian officer. Why did you make the story so personal?**

There's a challenge in telling a story on something that big. I think you can try and capture everything and fail – it'd just be really hard to do! When you're dealing with an individual or a small number of people, you can see the impact of all this on that person and it's a way to relate that story.

One of our inspirations was Vasily Grossman. He was on the front for a thousand days following the troops around, and you'd be very hard pressed to find a single group or a company of soldiers to follow from beginning to end on the Eastern Front as the Soviet army rebuilt itself three times. People obviously survived, but the churn was incredible.

**How long is the campaign in raw number terms, and is it hard to keep that narrative focus for the entire running time?**

There's 14 missions, but there's a good 20 hours plus worth of gameplay. We try to integrate as much of the narrative into the world as well (as cut-scenes), which is challenging. That's one of the reasons we tried to marry the visuals of the game with the visuals of the narrative (cut-scenes), which is why the camera comes out of the narrative and you're ready to play. That's why we blend those things and went with that style, so it keeps the players engaged with both the game and the narrative. ■

# BEYOND: TWO SOULS

## WHERE GAMES AND CINEMA MEET



PUB: SONY  
DEV:  
QUANTIC DREAM  
LAST GAME:  
HEAVY RAIN  
PLATFORMS:  
PLAYSTATION 3  
ETA: 8TH OCTOBER

**D**avid Cage is one of gaming's few truly auteur developers. As soon as gamers booted up either of his previous efforts, *Heavy Rain* and *Fahrenheit*, it was clear almost immediately what they were getting: a committed cinematic narrative with only minimal diligence paid to interactivity. Undoubtedly this kind of approach is divisive, as at what point is a developer making a game versus a interactive movie? But like Cage's work or not, one thing is certain: nobody in the industry makes games quite like him and his studio Quantic Dream.

*Beyond: Two Souls* is the next line in Cage's life-long mission to blur the lines between games and cinema as much as possible and this time he has recruited celebrated Hollywood talents

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*"Jody is constantly struggling to understand her place in the world"*

---

Ellen Page and Willem Dafoe to the cause. Page plays Jodie Holmes, a girl possessed by a supernatural essence/'other'



Jody straddles the line between vulnerable and empowered, moaning about her powers one moment and kicking ass with them the next.

which acts independently of her psyche, while Dafoe is her long time therapist/surrogate father Nathan Dawkins who is torn between protecting the young girl and finding out the scientific truth behind her puzzling abilities. As settings go, *Beyond's* certainly stands out, at least in the gaming world, and Jody as it turns out, is a fascinating character to play as.

Part bad-ass, part emotional wreck, Jody is constantly struggling to understand her place in the world as this demon from within her proves both a curse and a blessing. We've only seen about 30 minutes of *Beyond* in ➤



# PREVIEW



Nathan Dawkins' motivations seem unclear, but then our mistrust of Dafoe has gotten the better of us before.



action, care of a recent showing at the Tribeca Film Festival, but it seems the mystery surrounding Jody's power drives the majority of the 10-hour campaign. That isn't to say the plot isn't grounded in reality however.

The demo we witnessed featured Page wandering the streets of a snow-dusted city, along with four fellow homeless folks, including a pregnant woman, struggling to survive. Between beatings from upper-class yobs and basic apathy from more well-off urbanites, it's fair to say the demo offered up surprisingly gritty viewing. At one moment the player is tasked with delivering a baby, while the next they're fending off violent yobs attempting to kick the living snot out of homeless people. Strangely, the occult and gritty real-world context actually gels together really well and Quantic Dream has done an admirable job in capturing the performances of both their lead actors and supporting cast.



*Beyond's* plot goes all the way back to Jody's earliest years.



# OUT OF CONTROL

Thankfully the strange accents which blighted *Heavy Rain* are a distant memory, but character movement can still come across as a bit unnatural at times.

As alluded to before, *Beyond's* gameplay does consist of more viewing than actually doing, with on-screen prompts and

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*"The strange accents which blighted Heavy Rain are a very distant memory"*

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quicktime events prompting player action – like moving the controller up and down to climb a ledge. That isn't necessarily a criticism, it's just the design ethos Quantic Dream are going for.

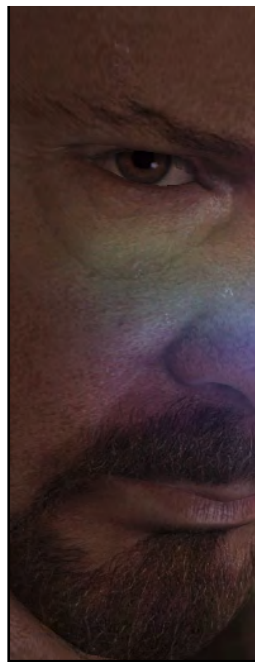
At the same time attempts to engage the player aren't quite as anal as *Heavy Rain* though. We saw Jody open windows and

doors without having to push the analog stick forward, but copious amounts of on-screen button prompts still occur and do break the immersion at times.

The demo we witnessed was wrought with danger and quieter dialogue-driven moments, yet still characters still came across as very human and emotional, which for a game is impressive.

Aside from David Cage's previous efforts, *Beyond: Two Souls* is unique in its execution, ambition and commitment to storytelling. This is an adventure game with all the fiddly bits like inventory management taken out, leaving the narrative to stand proudly and bravely on its own.

Quintessentially Cage and also unashamedly adult, *Beyond: Two Souls* is sure to rock your emotions to their core. ■



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# WARGAME: AIRLAND BATTLE

## MULTIPLAYER HANDS-ON



PUB: FOCUS INTERACTIVE  
DEV: EUGEN SYSTEMS  
LAST GAME: WARGAME:  
EUROPEAN ESCALATION  
PLATFORMS: PC  
ETA: 22ND MAY

## TWITTER



### @WargameRTS

Any screenshot to share with us? Feel free to share links of your screenshots under this post! #Wargame #RTS #PC



### @MSVenom

Just saw Wargame AirLand Battle has AI to fight against. Time to install the beta :D



### @Evolve Tom

Wargame AirLand Battle looks like the kinda game I want to play... but man, @PappyShannon kicked my ass this week.



### @NFXFSX

Picked up Wargame: AirLand Battle. Despite having a really dumb name, the added aircraft should be a blast.



### @dominictarason

Oh, nice! I look away for a couple days, and Wargame: AirLand Battle adds a skirmish mode. Looks fun.

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

## Death from above

With the imminent release of *Wargame: AirLand Battle*, we here at *FirstLook Magazine's* 10th Army HQ have been playing through the multiplayer Beta to give you a rundown of key strategies that makes this budget-priced spin-off different from its predecessor, *European Escalation*.

To be fair, waging war in *ALB* is fairly similar to how it was in *EE*, but there are several key differences. First up: elevation. Using a substantially enhanced engine, *AirLand Battle* is able to render environments vertically – so mountains, hills etc. Not that you really noticed it, but *EE* was very flat, with little or no elevation at all, so the effect this evolution has on a skirmish is eye-opening. You can use elevation for scouting, to hide troops behind the lip of a hill, and defend the high ground – depending on the map, mountain ranges act as natural buffers as well. Second up is the inclusion of buildings. Infantry can now occupy a 'grid' of buildings, abstractly covering all possible angles, for better defensive fire. It makes occupying key structures along crossroads and choke points that much more viable a strategy, and gives infantry a more meaningful purpose in the face of tanks etc. And finally there's Aircraft, and thankfully the introduction of jet fights and bombing units is literally a game changer.

Fast-moving bombers can lay waste to entire portions of your army before you even realise what is going on, but countering that prowess are high-speed interceptors and ground-based





*"Waging war in ALB is fairly similar to how it was in EE, but there are several key differences"*

# PREVIEW



National decks are a great idea, but it's inevitable that established powers like the USA will be infinitely more interesting than *AirLand Battle*'s new armies like Sweden and Denmark.



anti-aircraft batteries, which can lay waste to slow aircraft in a matter of seconds. They do seem a tad over-powered though, as you're unlikely to ever stop an air strike before it happens. Best you can do is make sure that you destroy the bomber before it flees, although seeing as how you only ever get a limited number, it does balance out. This new power struggle also means that attack helicopters are no longer important any more, as they're easily shot down and slower than planes.

## FLIGHT OF FANCY

*AirLand Battle* also sports a new and improved deck creation system for your armies. Each 'Deck' or roster taken in battle allows for a certain amount of units spread across different classes, like Tank, Recon, Infantry, etc. Each unit in a class costs a certain amount of 'Activation' points, which increases the more units of a particular type you have, working within an overall

limit. This means that specialising your deck without help can be costly, but *AirLand Battle* also has a system in place to help with that, as each deck can have potentially three bonuses applied to it – a National Bonus, A 'Theme' bonus, and an 'Era' bonus. A National bonus locks you to units of a particular nation, but it also gives you access to special 'prototype' units that mixed decks won't have. The Theme bonus allows you to specialise your army along particular lines – armoured, mechanised, airborne etc., which also affects the activation points costs for particular classes. Finally, the Era bonus locks your units from a particular time period, which could potentially leave you with a slightly outdated army, but you get more units to work with.

While it's great that you can have decks that concentrate on one specific nation, and even decks that are themed along certain

Modern RTS games tend to ignore aerial units, restricting them to support powers, but *AirLand Battle* gives players direct control of these flying slaughter machines.



lines, this system is not perfect. At the moment, only a handful of National rosters are interesting, and nearly all of them lack variety. This problem ties in with the doctrine specialisations, which don't really work that well – for example, if you choose to have a US-only army, and the 'Paratrooper' specialisation,

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*"The 10 vs 10 player battles prove as chaotic as they are enjoyable"*

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you'll find that there are no airborne infantry options available, which is absurd really.

We can't confirm if the unit roster at the moment is final, but if the national decks combined with doctrine specialisations are going to work properly, there needs to be a lot more unique units thrown in. *European Escalation* managed

to have a great unit line-up, so it's strange that *AirLand Battle* is struggling on this point. At the time of writing, the single-player dynamic campaign hasn't been added into the Beta yet, so we're unable to give you any impressions or information on that. Still, the multiplayer side of things is proving to be just as much fun, if not more, than *European Escalation* and the 10 vs 10 player battles prove as chaotic as they are enjoyable.

If you have a hankering for modern warfare with an aerial combat twist and can forgive Focus for releasing a new product so soon after *EE*, then this Cold War RTS should certainly be on your radar.

*Wargame: AirLand Battle* is due out for PC on May 22nd. ■

**Joe Robinson**



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# LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

TURBINE WALKS US THROUGH THEIR LATEST UPDATE



PUB: WARNER BROS.  
DEV: TURBINE INC.  
LAST GAME:  
DDO: MENACE OF THE UNDERDARK  
PLATFORMS: PC  
OUT NOW

Over the past six years we've fallen in and out of love with *Lord of the Rings Online* enough times to realise that Turbine knows what they're doing with Tolkien's fantasy universe. That's a statement that would make Captain Obvious blush, but it's true. While other MMORPGs have sprung up and quickly died, *LOTRO* has managed to remain popular enough for Turbine to evolve their work with worthwhile additions like mounted combat, new locations ripped right out of Tolkien's books and enough visual and tonal variety in their game world to successfully

communicate the other worldly scope this fantasy fiction demands.

What's most impressive about Turbine's strategy is that they've managed to accomplish all this, without digging into the

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*"Die pitifully against the forces of Saruman and Sauron"*

---

'A' material of Tolkien's universe – namely the point when the combined forces of Middle earth actually begin to do anything other than die pitifully against the

'I am Núrzum!'

ARROW WAGGON

GRIMGAR

HUMBALD

Nurzum isn't a Pokemon, he can say a lot more than just his name.

EXCLUSIVE  
SHOTS

forces of Saruman and Sauron.

Last year's *Riders of Rohan* expansion was the beginning of that content, placed right at the beginning of *The Two Towers* in the *LOTRO* chronology. With the next expansion *Helm's Deep* teased but not yet dated, it would be easy to presume that *LOTRO*'s latest free update titled *Treachery of the White Hand* would feed directly into that content, but during a recent hands-on tour of the new content Turbine were careful not to discuss anything big battle related. Instead they wanted to talk up the carefully constructed new region of Wildermore. ➤

Like previous updates, White Hand boasts a great deal of fantastic nord-inspired architecture.



# PREVIEW



The sidequest involving a pregnant widow being ostracised from a group of survivors, merely due to her class is one of this updates more meatier sidequests.



There's no voiced dialogue in this update, subtitles only so keep those eyes peeled!

In the plainest terms, this region in East Rohan consists of five locales: Writhendowns, The Fallows, Whitshaws, High Knolls and Balewood, all of which are blighted by blistery conditions orchestrated by a corrupted Stone Giant named Núrzum, granted unnatural power by Saruman. What's interesting about this content is that Turbine is telling the entire story arc of this character in this single update – a path rarely trodden by the Boston studio. If we didn't know otherwise, it'd be easy to assume that Núrzum is a Tolkien creation, as his massive strength and form certainly fits in this universe, but he's actually Turbine's own design.

Interspersed between quests telling the story of this antagonist's emergence there's also a tale involving a sleepy Ent, a pregnant widow shunned by fellow survivors in a dark, dank cave, and a peculiar 25-player fishing contest requiring competitors to cast out nets to



catch fish while on horseback. There's also new mead halls to explore, 13 new roaming War Bands to eliminate, multiple new single-player instances, and some awe-inspiring landscapes to discover. Basically the kind of content you'd expect from one of the more regular *LOTRO* updates, only in more generous supply. All of this new story content is

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*"Free Hobbit presents are sent to all players on a daily basis"*

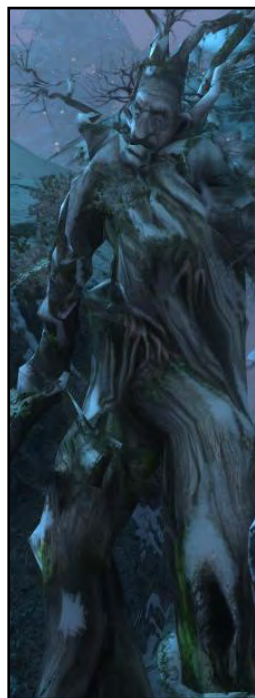
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automatically available to all pay monthly VIP players for no extra cost, whereas free and Premium players have to pay a one-time fee.

Along with this new story content, general improvements are also being made to *LOTRO* such as free Hobbit presents sent to all players on a daily basis and more streamlined mounted

combat with the three-pronged skill-tree scaled back to just two components, Attack and Defense. Now all skills associated with the now-redundant Movement tree are allocated to all steeds automatically, allowing more reactive mounted combat.

All in all, *LOTRO* is evolving at a nice pace thanks to updates like *White Hand*, and even though there's a distinct feeling that Turbine are saving the best features for the looming *Helm's Deep* expansion, it's good to know that there's new content ready whenever we happen to log on next. Turbine's latest update hasn't quite tempted us to jump back into Middle-earth quite yet, but with big plans on the horizon there's an increasingly powerful feeling that our hairy little Hobbit tootsies will trek back into *LOTRO* soon. Next stop *Helm's Deep*! ■



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## KNIGHTS OF PEN & PAPER: +1 EDITION

### HANDS ON WITH THE META-RPG



**PUB:** PARADOX  
**INTERACTIVE**  
**DEV:** BEHOLD  
**STUDIOS**  
**LAST GAME:** BIT BIT  
**MACHINE**  
**PLATFORMS:** PC,  
iOS, ANDROID  
**ETA:** Q2 2013

If any proof were needed that mobile devices are beginning to seriously challenge consoles and PC for gaming supremacy then *Knights of Pen & Paper*, a strange yet colourful meta-RPG from Brazilian developers Behold Studios, is certainly it. Boasting the strange premise of players assuming the roles of both dungeon master and adventurer in a simulated table-top game, this is an experience that every fan of *Elder Scrolls*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Dragon Age* and pretty much any other RPG out there needs to play.

Don't get the wrong idea, we aren't ready to swap our desktop

for a tablet or anything crazy like that, but iOS and Android is proving a fertile ground for developers to try out new ideas

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*"Knights of Pen & Paper casts the player as both Dungeon Master and adventurer"*

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and that's something we can all benefit from. Let's break it down.

*Knights of Pen & Paper* casts the player as both dungeon master and adventurer, choosing quests



and enemies for as many as five weary travellers to conquer. You choose the make-up of the roleplaying group including which individuals join in the fun, be it a blonde airhead named 'Paris', a business man called 'Mr John', a fat gamer christened 'Hynx', or a dye-job known as 'Flowers' etc. and which of four classes they play as – Druid, Cleric, Warrior and Mage. Each has its own linear skill tree and as players complete quests, created by the player, and fight enemy configurations, again selected by the player, they all level up unlocking new skills. All the while this is going on neither ➔



# PREVIEW



Adventurers of any level can travel the world, with a dice roll determining if they encounter enemies.

**Amusement Park (100%)**  
Old history books tells that a group entered a portal and could never get back home. (lv.40)



the DM or the adventurers leave the table, but the world around them instantly transitions to whatever location they visit.

It's impossible not to get an old-school SNES RPG vibe from proceedings as battles are turn based and the fantasy map for the most part relies on traditional staples of overgrown rat enemies, evil guards and missing blacksmiths, but the whole experience is so damn cute, with its chip tunes and fourth wall-breaking references, that you can't help but go along with it.

Essentially the player controls his or her adventurers' own destinies by both controlling them in combat and setting the difficulty of the enemies they face, and that ties into a neat risk versus reward mechanic where more powerful enemies grant better loot, more XP and more dollars. This is an interesting mechanic which we've never seen before and it ties directly into buying new equipment from blacksmiths for your team,



Dollar yield from battles is fair, but having that \$ sign there is a constant reminder of the in-game cash store.

In terms of content and visuals, *Knights of Pen & Paper* is absolutely adorable.



upgrading items and modifying the DM's room with various tables, chairs, wallhangings etc.

Unfortunately the one aspect which seems to have come across wholesale from the iOS and Android versions of *KoP&P* is the in-game cash shop. As

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*"KoP&P is a novel idea in a genre which is often distractingly unoriginal"*

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mentioned before, players earn dollars by completing quests and killing enemies, but they can also purchase them via an in-game real cash shop. Prices are still being weighed up by Paradox for the +1 Edition, but being charged a price for this game and then having the economy weighted by in-game micro-transactions is

a tricky balance to get right.

Paradox are adding a great deal of content to this new edition in collaboration with its creators, such as dungeons, the ability to fast travel, a new carnival zone, a high school, the ability to add and swap out adventurers from a team during a playthrough and a new arcade setting, complete with what looks like an *IT Crowd*-themed pinball table, but we'll wait until a firm pricing strategy is announced before giving it our final seal of approval.

*KoP&P* is a novel idea in a genre which is often distractingly unoriginal. We only hope that its innate charm isn't diminished by an insane pricing strategy. ■



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# NIGHT OF THE RABBIT

**PUB:** DAEDELIC  
**ENTERTAINMENT**  
**DEV:** IN-HOUSE  
**PLAT:** PC  
**ETA:** 29TH MAY

## A MAGICAL POINT-AND-CLICK REVIVAL

**T**he the days of mega publishers happily splurging millions of dollars on a point-and-click experience have passed, but there's still more than enough production cash and expertise out there for mid-sized efforts to flourish, serving an under-nourished audience. Daedelic Entertainment has been happily serving this niche for half a decade with all manner of adventure games ranging from cute and funny, such as *The Whispered World*, to serious and preachy, see *A New Beginning*. *The White Rabbit* happily finds itself on the cuddly side of that spectrum, boasting an enchanting setting, gorgeous environments and a load of anthropomorphic characters.

Players will get an idea of this release's otherworldliness right from the off, with

the fate of a rabbit magician intertwined with that of a 12-year-old named Jeremiah Hazelnut. This card-carrying jungle explorer (seriously, he joined a club and everything) is only two days away from starting another

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*"Verges from sickeningly sweet Disney one moment to Studio Ghibli-style craziness the next"*

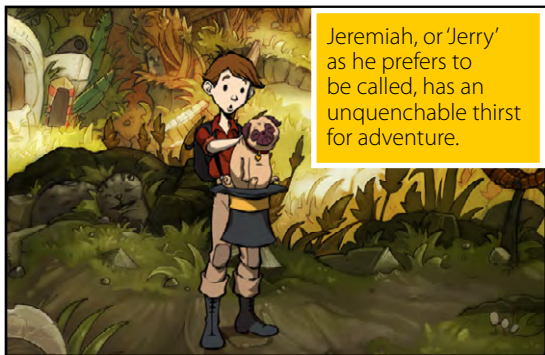
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school year, but that doesn't stop him starting a strange carrot-burning ritual which transports him to a magical realm.

In terms of tone and plot, *Night of the Rabbit* verges from sickeningly sweet Disney



The one-click interface means that the cursor transitions between interact, pick-up, look and talk automatically.



Jeremiah, or 'Jerry' as he prefers to be called, has an unquenchable thirst for adventure.



*Night of the Rabbit* certainly has an *Alice in Wonderland* vibe going for it.

one moment to Studio Ghibli-style craziness the next, which in terms of tone makes it a rather unique adventure experience and one worth sticking with. This is important to note, as Daedelic's release is definitely skewed more towards more experienced and patient point-and-click players with an inventory system and the need to pixel hunt a regular necessity. This complexity creates a lot of freedom, as players always have multiple environments to explore, but at the same time when you become stuck on a puzzle, there's little option but to clang everything together in your inventory and hope something miraculous occurs.

Some gameplay problems still remain, including the lack of any kind of movement

speed toggle, but the English dub at least is an improvement over previous games, with the protagonist's preppy performance proving more *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* than *Dusseldorf Stage School Presents*.

*Night of the Rabbit* is very much an old-school point-and-click experience, with endearing characters and gorgeous environments, and it's sure to win a few hearts when it's released later this month. ■

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# The continued evolution of...

# autoclub revolution™

## Eutechnyx take their free-to-play racer in a new direction

**W**ith little to no fanfare, the ambitious free-to-play racer *Auto Club Revolution* has gone through momentous changes over the past six months. The criminally ignored online game from Eutechnyx has blossomed from an unimaginative collect-a-thon racer to a relaxed and unrestricted online playground for motorheads to flaunt their racing prowess.

Eutechnyx has added wet weather, the ability to race against AI,

overhauled the game's handling model (so it feels more responsive and alive), and players can now group together and earn collective XP via Car Clubs. It's as if in the background Eutechnyx has re-evaluated their flagship game's place in the increasingly competitive free-to-play racer market, from the likes of *SimRaceway*, *Need for Speed World*, and SimBin's *RaceRoom Experience*, and doubled down on what really matters – the core race experience.

The 2011 BMW 1M Coupé is the only car which boasts a fully modelled cockpit but more are coming.

## > Car Select



Jaguar XKR-S

Top Speed  
Braking  
Acceleration  
Handling  
Cornering

495  
MAXIMUM  
CLASS  
Selected

## > Single Player Multiplayer

### Single Player Practice

TIME TRIAL WITH REALTIME RANKING

Race Now

### Single Player Race

RACE VS. CPU

Race Now

## > Car Achievements

Jaguar XKR-S  
Car Mastery

1800  
EXP  
900

20%

Complete a lap of Lakeside Italia Main Route in under 02:00.000

720  
EXP  
450

0%

Apply a Cosmetic Item to this Car

720  
EXP  
450

0%

Finish ahead of a Class A car in a race

720  
EXP  
450

0%



## > Daily Challenge

500

Completed

Apply an upgrade to your car



Griffiths

Cars Mastered: 0

Achievements Completed: 3/114

Cars Owned: 19

RANK

Current EXP: 4924

8240

## > Featured Cars



B  
EXCLUSIVE

## > News & Updates



## > Suggested Friends



angelsman668



720

A

The Home menu is now much easier to navigate, with new racing opportunities only a click away.

"Everything that Eutechnyx has goes into *Auto Club Revolution*. There isn't an idea that's going to get thrown out. We're going to make this a success," Christoph Vietzke, the Executive Producer of Eutechnyx's free-to-play racer tells us in an unassuming London office. "We didn't take enough care a year ago or so when we went into open Beta; to actually have a very good racing game."

He's right. ACR's open Beta was riddled with issues, but now the game has properly launched, with a fancy new logo and refreshed user interface, that core race experience has become very strong.

Between modding cars, creating elaborate paint schemes and taking part in eight-player racers on iconic tracks like Indianapolis, Daytona, Spa-Francorchamps and Germany's



ACR's Ultra settings will test most modern computers, but overall the client scales well.



There are plenty of exotic cars to choose from in ACR.



Hockenheimring, Eutechnyx has a solid base to build upon with community empowerment at the centre of its appeal. With great contact-heavy racing influenced by a time penalty system to discourage anti-social behaviour and corner cutting, ACR already has enough

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*“ACR already has enough about it to be a successful online race service”*

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about it to be a successful online race service, but what really interests us is the potential for Eutechnyx to go even further with their experience.

## MOTORSPORT MADNESS

“We’ve got enough cars on the road in there to have a good game, but we want to go in the direction of the more powerful and more iconic,” Christoph tells us. The already-included American muscle cars are a



Players will still be limited to using templates rather than importing their own liveries in the future.

prime example of that new mindset being implemented, but Eutechnyx want to go substantially further than that, by expanding into the licensed motorsport area of the racing genre.

"We definitely want to have cars that have a race series background. That's how we want to develop the game by offering more things that are connected together, with more of a tournament approach."

Racing games in general have moved away from the licensed racer route. Aside from the big marquee licenses like Formula One and the World Rally Championship, many formerly established racing game tie-ins have bitten the dust leaving the likes of the British Touring Car Championship, DTM, Indy Car and lots of others without any game

representation. The reasons for this are easy to grasp: games cost a lot to develop, and aiming to satisfy a niche audience is the fastest way to send investors running for the hills, but as the base of ACR is already established Eutechnyx don't have that problem. The developers can get content like a car or track into their free-to-play racer in only 12 weeks after a licensing agreement has been signed, which places them ahead of the competition.

Eutechnyx already has the infrastructure to house this content within *Auto Club Revolution* via dedicated standalone channels. Just imagine a series dedicated to the racing car manufacturer Ginetta or maybe a slot recreating the ongoing Renault Clio Championship? This is something no other developer/

# FEATURE

Cars can usually either be purchased with in-game credits or real-world cash, but prices have shrunk considerably over the past 12 months.



ACR currently has a mostly Russian/Central European audience but slowly those demographics are changing.

publisher would consider, but Eutechnyx could implement this kind of content easily, as long as they snapped up the license.

A lot of collaborations and potential collaborations are still yet to

*"If we can give fans content they can't get anywhere else then that's great"*

be confirmed, but representatives from Eutechnyx did tease a collaboration with an existing F1 team and that it was one of many partnerships coming to *Auto Club Revolution* in the future.

Updates involving adding a cockpit view to every car and more laser-scanned tracks, after May's

1

BLUE

Hello Griffiths

You are in Blue 1

Change Hangout

RACE NOW

The Grid

Griffiths

Aa\_Nax

Isacks

Alex\_M

Axix81

Faust940826

Aragueto

goDg

Aaso8ll

1 - 9 of 89 racers

Ch...

Or...

DazGem: hi there punkdrien

silvers: yay a new car for free

silvers: plz you can join and thanks

Welcome to Blue 1 Race Hangout (English La

Please keep chat appropriate

Jurgenecek: has created a race: [Click to join!](#)

Eldaro has created a race: [Click to join!](#)

gashapon69 has created a race: [Click to join!](#)

Maux75 has created a race: **You can't join**

Matiezx has created a race: **You can't join**

matus2300 has created a race: [Click to join!](#)

silvers: lucy now was that?

riablo87 has created a race: [Click to join!](#)

Gonz056: Jurgenecek start the race

Quick Race

Eliminator

Pick a Race

Messages

Friends Online

Car Select

Need Help?

Help Centre

1/3

LP 00:00:45

SB -:-:-- (-)

BL -:-:--

3 Ksaos

+ 00:00:02

4 Griffiths

5 DENNISrBO...

- 00:00:24



The HUD alone has evolved massively during the past year, featuring real-time gaps between competitors and a radar to more easily avoid collisions.

surprise launch of Brands Hatch, we were also teased during our intriguing meeting, but it's this idea ubiquitous online motorsport platform offering game representation to otherwise maligned motorsport series which excited us the most.

Eutechnyx still needs to implement a lot of features and content for *Auto Club Revolution* to start challenging the status quo for supremacy, such as securing more licensed tracks, adding

cars from Ferrari, and raising the existing eight-player limit during races, but it's clear from our discussions that all those things are on the drawing board over the coming 12 months and beyond. This free-to-play racer has evolved substantially over the past year and from our discussions it seems the next year is going to be just as interesting. Buckle up boys and girls, this service is going places. ■

## GRAB A FREE ACR STARTER PACK!

At GamerZines.com we're giving away 100 free starter packs for *Auto Club Revolution* which consist of two free cars (Dodge Challenger SRT8 and Volvo C30 TF) and 10K worth of in-game credit to upgrade and customise your cars. Click the button below to seize your chance to win!



To grab your code before they race away, click here!

# Upcoming DLC & UGC

## Borderlands 2: Krieg

DLC

PUB: 2K Games  
DEV: Gearbox  
Software  
OUT NOW

**D**espite dozens of shooters appearing since the release of *Borderlands 2* last year, somehow Gearbox's release still manages to stay afloat of the public zeitgeist. The key to this appeal has been some inspired cross-promotional tie-ins, *Poker Night 2*, and a steady flow of post-release DLC. The latest of which involves a new character ominously named 'Krieg the Psycho'. This new playable character is a melee-focused high-stakes damage dealer who has the ability to recoup health while

attacking enemies. Along with these new combat possibilities is a host of new quests, abilities and most importantly of all, loot. That *Borderlands 2* train keeps on a-chugging along! ■



## iRacing: Kia Optima

DLC

PUB: iRacing  
DEV: In-house  
OUT NOW

**D**riving simulators don't come more exciting than *iRacing*. It really is as simple as that, and this month the formerly oval-centric service took a big step

towards winning over the touring car crowd with the stunningly stable and beautifully understated KIA Optima. Now we know what you're thinking... the Korean motor company aren't exactly known for their racing prowess but then that's what makes this bit of DLC so much more surprising. This car's sturdy frame and 375bhp allows players to indulge in a bit of bumper and sidepanel bashing without wrecking anyone's race, and the front wheel drive means that taps from behind are easily recoverable. More cars like this please *iRacing* if you're listening. ■



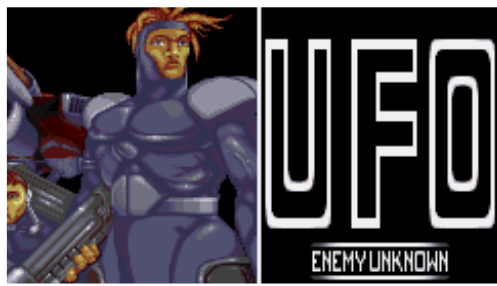
# OpenXcom

UGC

DEV: [OpenXcom](#)  
FIND IT: [openxcom.org](#)  
OUT NOW

Not every mod seeks to build on the foundations of an existing and functional release, some are put together to simply make an ageing relic live on once more. *OpenXcom* is firmly planted in the latter category, and functions as an open-source reimplementation of all the assets present in *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, allowing the brutal strategy game from 1994 to be played easily on a multitude of PCs – past and present – without the need for DosBox. It's worth stating that players must own a copy of that original version to snap up this mod, not only due to copyright issues, but also because the installer requires the

original data files to function properly. Mods get closed down left, right and centre for copyright issues, but *OpenXcom* is an example of a community doing the hard work of compatibility and optimisation for a product which would otherwise be consigned to the history books. Bravo *XC*OM fans! ■



# Duke Nukem Forever 2013

UGC

DEV: [Gambini & Mikko Sandt](#)  
FIND IT: [ModDB](#)  
OUT NOW

3D Realms well and truly screwed up any potential *Duke Nukem Forever* had long before Gearbox Software salvaged the release and put it out into the wilderness to



be mauled by critics and fans alike. Understandably there's still a lot of bad feeling out there, but that isn't to say the modding community are ready to say goodbye to Mr Duke quite yet. *DNF 2013* is a total conversion mod for *Duke Nukem 3D* with new levels, weapons and gameplay ripped from a 2001 preview of *Duke Nukem Forever*, before several subsequent redesigns. Some of the set-pieces and content from Gearbox's release make it into the game, but really this mod comes across as a greatest hits take on the macho hero. Proving that the mindless no-fuss, all-frags gameplay is still enjoyable even today, albeit for only a few minutes at a time. ■

## The Showdown Effect



PUB: Paradox Int.  
DEV: Arrowhead  
Game Studios  
OUT NOW

The best kind of DLC is free DLC. Okay that isn't always true, but we appreciate the sentiment nonetheless. Arrowhead Game Studios has added two new Wild West themed maps to their fast-paced online 2.5D fighter, along with two new heroes: a British super spy named Thelma Vaine and a bodybuilder cyborg named Dr. Johnny Bionic. If that wasn't enough, the team behind *Magicka* has also added a bunch of new costume pieces to the game for free, based around Reddit memes. *The Showdown Effect* didn't bowl us over when we played it

earlier this year, but if new content keeps getting added to the game at this rate public opinion will definitely turn in Arrowhead's favour. Shine on your crazy Swedes, shine on! ■



## Injustice: Gods Among Us



PUB: Warner Bros.  
DEV: NetherRealm  
Studios  
OUT NOW

The DC Universe got another beat-'em-up last month thanks to NetherRealm, the makers of *Mortal Kombat*, finally releasing *Injustice: Gods Among Us*. Despite

boasting a truly bizarre storyline, the overall game was received rather well thanks to its core fighting mechanics which feature some of the craziest finishers ever seen in a comicbook game. Our personal favourite involved Batman running his opponent over with an auto-piloted Batmobile, but that's not important. What is important is that a set of four new characters are heading to this beat-'em-up as part of DLC. The first was Lobo and he was released earlier this month, and the next is going to be, wait for it, Batgirl. Two more characters have yet to be revealed, and we really hope those inclusions are a little bit more imaginative. ■



# Heroes & Villains



DEV: Plan Z  
FIND IT: [www.heroes-and-villains.com](http://www.heroes-and-villains.com)  
ETA: TBA

**T**echnically, *Heroes & Villains* is a standalone game rather than a mod, but seeing as this project came about when NCSoft decided to close the beloved MMORPG *City of Heroes*, we're going to slot



them in here. This month Plan Z, a collective of developers scattered around the world working to make a worthy successor to *City of Heroes*, released the first screenshot of *Heroes & Villains* and it's looking alright. A bit sparse to be sure, and choosing a shot of Earth from Outer Space doesn't really tell players much about how the final game is going to shape up, but it does evoke notes of Superman looking over the green and blue planet from Justice League headquarters. Currently there are more questions than answers regarding this project, with no release in sight, but we wish Plan Z luck in their efforts. Excelsior! ■

# Minerva



DEV: Adam Foster  
FIND IT: [Steam](http://Steam)  
OUT NOW

**V**alve are an absolutely maddening company to work with from a games coverage perspective. The Seattle-based developer rarely announce anything, they never share their plans and they seem to do things with little to no warning. The perfect example of this kind of behaviour was seen earlier this month when seemingly out of the blue, Valve released a substantially overhauled version of the classic *Half-Life: Episode 1* mod *Minerva* via Steam. The 2013 edition boasted new textures and improved Source compatibility making it easy for PC players of all expertise to try it out. This unofficial extension to the *Half-Life* universe, featuring players marooned on an island

controlled by the Carbine, is still just as fascinating as it was when it was released in 2007, only now it's much prettier and easy to get hold of. Thanks Valve, just give us a bit of a warning next time though, yeah? ■



ISSUE 06

# NEXT MONTH



## THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE



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**ISSUE 6:  
JUNE  
20TH**



# CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS

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